

Sociodemographic Predictors and Cultural Barriers to Help-Seeking Behavior by Latina and Anglo American Battered Women

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Data from a national survey were used to investigate the help-seeking efforts of Latinas (Mexican, Mexican American, Puerto Rican) and Anglo American women who experienced battering by intimate partners. The findings revealed that battered Latinas were significantly younger, less educated, and more impoverished than Anglo women. Additionally, Latinas more often categorized their marriages as male dominated and their husbands as heavy drinkers. Bivariate analyses showed that Latinas who sought help were significantly more acculturated and more likely to have a heavy drinking husband than those who did not seek help. Although battered women were active help seekers, Latinas underutilized both informal and formal resources relative to Anglo women, with Mexican women least likely to seek assistance. When sociodemographic predictors of help seeking were analyzed, being youthful and Anglo significantly increased the odds of help-seeking efforts. Low acculturation, as measured by preference for the Spanish language, was the only significant cultural barrier to help seeking by Latinas. Implications for treatment include improved outreach and advocacy to underserved groups.

Although much has been published on the prevalence of partner violence (e.g., Straus & Gelles, 1990), few studies have investigated the extent and nature of battered women's help-seeking efforts (Gordon, 1996). Even less of the literature has focused specifically on the help-seeking efforts made by battered women of color. This is an oversight because Latinos are the second largest and fastest growing minority group in the United States (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1993). Moreover, there is substantial economic, demographic, and cultural diversity among Latino ethnic groups (see Kaufman Kantor, Jasinski, & Aldarondo, 1994; West, 1998 for a detailed discussion of the influence of sociocultural status on Latino family violence). These Latino ethnic group differences may have implications for the help-seeking process (Keefe, 1982). Nevertheless, most previous researchers have treated Latinos as a homogeneous group. This study will address the lack of research

by investigating the amount and type of help sought as well as sociodemographic and cultural factors that may influence help-seeking efforts of Latinas and Anglo battered women. Ethnic group differences in help seeking among Mexican, Mexican American, and mainland Puerto Rican women also will be considered.

PATTERNS OF HELP-SEEKING

Despite prior assumptions concerning battered women's passivity, researchers have found that more than half the women in their samples sought some type of assistance (Grayson & Smith, 1981; Horton & Johnson, 1993). An analysis of battered women's help-seeking patterns show that they initially turned to their informal support network of friends and relatives (Horton & Johnson, 1993; Gondolf & Fisher, 1988). As the violence escalated in severity, victims more frequently consulted formal help sources (Harris & Dewdney, 1994) such as the criminal justice system, followed by social service agencies, medical services, crisis hotlines, mental health services, clergy members, support groups, and battered women's shelters (Bowker, 1988; Gordon, 1996; Hamilton & Coates, 1993). However, much of this research has been limited to small community-based samples drawn from varying geographic areas (Bowker, 1988; Bowker & Maurer, 1986; Donato & Bowker, 1984). Unlike previous scholars, we used data from a national probability sample of families to examine help-seeking behavior among Latinas and Anglo battered women.

Ethnic Differences in Help-Seeking Behavior

Using shelter samples, researchers have found ethnic differences in help-seeking efforts. For example, O'Keefe (1994) discovered that Latinas in her sample reported receiving less help from family and friends than did Anglo women, though not significantly so. Ethnic differences in the use of formal help sources also have been reported. Specifically, battered Latinas in two shelter samples, when compared to Anglo women, were more likely to call the police and less likely to contact a clergy member or social service agency (Gondolf, Fisher, & McFerron, 1991; Torres, 1991).

These findings should be interpreted with caution for several reasons. First, shelter samples may not represent the general population of battered women with regard to severity of violence experienced (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988). In addition, "ethnic lumping," or using one group, for example, Mexican Americans, to represent the experiences of other Latino ethnic groups is potentially misleading (Fontes, 1997). Another research limitation is the failure to consider cultural resources that are unique to Latinas, for example, the practice of visiting healers who use herbs, prayers, and rituals (Torres, 1987). Despite the research limitations, previous studies point to a pattern of service underutilization by battered Latinas.

PREDICTORS AND BARRIERS TO HELP-SEEKING

As one might expect, severity of abuse has been associated with increased help-seeking efforts (Harris & Dewdney, 1994), but there is a need to consider other dimensions of outreach. For instance, although sociodemographic and culturally based factors have been shown to be predictors of medical and mental health service utilization (Horwitz, 1987; Rodriguez & O'Donnell, 1995; Woodward, Dwinell, & Arons, 1992), few studies have investigated these factors as predictors or barriers to the help-seeking efforts of battered women.

Sociodemographic Predictors

The general health care utilization literature demonstrates that young, educated, Anglo women with greater economic resources were more likely than Latinos to seek medical and mental health care (Horwitz, 1987; Woodward et al., 1992). We expect that these same sociodemographic disparities will influence the help-seeking behavior of battered Latinas. In both national (Kaufman Kantor et al., 1994; Straus & Smith, 1990) and shelter samples (Gondolf et al., 1991; O'Keefe, 1994; Torres, 1991) Latino families who reported wife assaults were more educationally and economically disadvantaged when compared to Anglo families. Consequently, Latinas may have less access to telephone service or transportation which may result in greater difficulty using formal resources. Moreover, Mexicans often had even fewer economic resources than their Mexican American counterparts. Therefore, Mexican women may be even less likely than Mexican American and Anglo women to seek assistance after being battered.

Cultural Barriers

Level of acculturation, as measured by language preference, has often been identified as an obstacle to obtaining assistance. That is, individuals who are not proficient in English are less able to access formal help sources (Altarriba & Santiago-Rivera, 1994; Woodward et al., 1992). Kanuha (1994) proposed that more acculturated, second- and third-generation battered Latinas may be more familiar with and accepting of mental health services and thus more likely to seek assistance. However, she reported no empirical tests of her hypothesis. Therefore, additional research needs to investigate acculturation level as a potential barrier to help seeking among Latinas.

Regardless of ethnicity, culturally linked values and behaviors such as male-dominated marriages (Coleman & Straus, 1990), the endorsement of cultural norms sanctioning partner assaults (Kaufman Kantor et al., 1994), and husbands' heavy drinking (Kaufman Kantor, 1997) have been associated with an increased risk of wife assaults. These factors may potentially pose barriers to the help-seeking efforts of battered women. For example, the social isolation enforced by a dominant and controlling husband may restrict a battered woman's mobility and thus her opportunity to contact help. Women who believe that abuse is acceptable under some circumstances may not perceive themselves as victims and therefore may be less likely to seek assistance when assaulted (Torres, 1991). Furthermore, fear of escalating violence or feelings of obligation toward an alcoholic husband may prevent some women from seeking assistance. There is evidence that Latinas are more likely than Anglo women to be in male-dominated marriages (Jasinski, 1996), experience conflict with their husbands around decision making, express a more tolerant attitude toward wife abuse (Torres, 1991), and have heavy drinking husbands (Kaufman Kantor, 1997). However, more empirical evidence is needed to determine if these cultural factors also impede the help-seeking behavior of both Latinas and Anglo women. Unlike previous researchers who have taken a race comparative approach, this study also will investigate within-ethnic group differences. For example, we will consider sociodemographic and cultural differences between Latinas who seek help and Latinas who do not.

Goals of the Study

Taken together, the research suggests that there is an underutilization of services by battered Latinas, particularly by Mexican women. These findings lead to the following research questions: (a) To what extent do battered Latinas and Anglo women differ on sociodemographic and cultural factors?; (b) how much and what types of help are sought by Latinas

and Anglo battered women? how does help-seeking behavior differ by ethnic group and among the various Latina ethnic groups?; (c) are there within-ethnic group differences in help seeking?; (d) what sociodemographic factors predict help seeking?; and (e) what cultural factors act as barriers to help seeking?

METHOD

Sample

The data used for this paper were obtained in 1992 as a part of a national study on alcohol-family violence relationships (National Alcohol and Family Violence Survey) (Kaufman Kantor & Asdigian, 1997; Kaufman Kantor et al., 1994). Face-to-face interviews were conducted with a national probability sample of 1,970 persons, including an oversample of 846 Latinos, who were living as a couple with a member of the opposite sex. One member of each household, either the husband or the wife, was randomly selected and interviewed. Bilingual interviewers were utilized in oversample areas and respondents had the choice of taking the interview in English or Spanish. The overall response rate for all eligible individuals was 75.4%. The response rate for Latinos in oversample areas was 80.3%.

Measures

Ethnicity. The ethnicity of respondents was assessed by the question "Which of these racial and ethnic groups do you consider yourself: Pacific Islander; Asian; Native American or Alaskan Native; White but not Latino; Black but not Latino; Latino or Hispanic, or some other group?" The analyses for this paper focused on those respondents who indicated that their race/ethnicity was either White but not Latino, or Latino or Hispanic. Latinos from the major United States ethnic groups included in this paper were those who self-identified as Mexican, Mexican American, and Puerto Rican. Cuban American women were excluded because the numbers reporting wife assaults were too low for reliable analyses.

Dependent Variables

Help-Seeking Behavior. To measure help-seeking behavior, respondents were asked about both formal and informal types of help seeking based on Gottlieb's (1978) classification of helping behavior. The following question was asked: "Was there ever a time when you contacted any of the following because of your disagreements?" Possible responses included friends, relatives, shelter, psychologist, clergy, healer, lawyer, police, and others.

Wife Assault. Physical aggression was measured with the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) (Straus, 1990). Respondents were asked to think of situations in the past year when they disagreed or were angry with a spouse or partner and then to indicate how often they engaged in each of the acts included in the CTS. The same questions were repeated and respondents were asked to report on their partner's behavior. In this study the husband-to-wife assault variable included the following violent acts (e.g., threw something at the other; pushed, grabbed, or shoved; slapped or spanked; kicked, bit or hit with fist; hit or tried to hit with something; beat up the other; threatened with a knife or gun; used a knife or gun). The husband-to-wife assault variable was coded as a dichotomy where a value of 1 indicated the presence of any violence that occurred during the course of the marital or cohabiting relationship. Respondents were categorized as severely battered if they experienced one or more of the acts of violence included in the severe violence index (i.e., the last five CTS items listed above, "kicked" through the "use of a knife or gun").

Independent Variables

Education. To measure educational attainment, respondents were asked the following question about themselves and their partner: "What is the last year of school that you have completed?"

Poverty. The measure used to assess poverty was based on an income-to-needs ratio of family economic status and was calculated by dividing household income by its corresponding poverty threshold specified by the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1992). The poverty threshold, which varies by family size, is based on the expenses considered necessary for minimally acceptable amounts of food and other necessities (Duncan & Rodgers, 1991).

Acculturation. The measure assessing acculturation for the respondents and their spouse was composed of four items adapted from Szapocznik, Scopetta, Kurtines, and Aranalde (1978) and the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (National Center for Health Statistics, 1985). The items refer to language preference and utilization of Spanish versus English in a variety of situations: (a) "What language do you (your partner) prefer to speak?"; (b) "What language do you (your partner) prefer to speak at home?"; (c) "What language do you (your partner) prefer to speak with friends?"; (d) "What language do you (your partner) prefer to speak at work?" The response categories were: "Spanish all the time"; "Spanish most of the time"; "Spanish and English equally"; "English most of the time"; "English all the time." Items were combined into a summative scale ranging from 4 to 21. High scores indicated greater English proficiency.

Marital Power Structure. The balance of power between spouses was measured by questions based on the work of Blood and Wolfe (1960) that asked the respondents to indicate "Who has the final say" in making decisions about the following six issues: buying a car, having children, what house or apartment to take, what job either partner should take, whether a partner should go to work or quit work, and how much money to spend each week for food. The responses for each issue are: "husband only," "husband more than wife," "husband and wife exactly the same," "wife more than husband," and "wife only." The pattern of responses to these six questions was used to classify couples in a dichotomous manner as male-dominant or other marital power structure based on final say for different gender-typed decisions. The work of Blood and Wolfe (1960) has been used in other nationally representative samples to measure marital power in violent relationships (e.g., Coleman & Straus, 1990).

Approval of Violence. To measure norms tolerating wife abuse, we replicated the measure first employed in a 1968 survey conducted for the President's Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence: "Are there situations that you can imagine in which you would approve of a husband slapping his wife?" (Kaufman Kantor & Straus, 1987; Owens & Straus, 1975).

Husband's Drinking. Husband's drinking behavior was measured by asking women respondents about their partner's quantity and frequency of drinking. The responses were categorized as heavy and nonheavy according to a manner previously utilized by Kaufman Kantor, and Straus (1987) (see also Kaufman Kantor, & Asdigian, 1997). The heavy drinking category included all husbands who were classified by the respondents as either high daily drinkers (four or more drinks per occasion, drunk on average four to seven days a week in the previous year), or binge drinkers (five or more drinks per occasion, drunk from less than once a month up to three days a week on average in the previous year). Nonheavy drinkers included those husbands who were classified as abstinent, low, or moderate drinkers.

RESULTS

Sample Descriptives

Analyses included women who reported ever experiencing any battering by their current partner during the course of their marital relationship, regardless of their help-seeking patterns. The sample of battered women consisted of 76 Latinas who identified as Mexican ($n = 40$), Mexican American ($n = 19$), or Puerto Rican ($n = 17$), and 117 Anglo American women.

Part I of Table 1 presents data on sociodemographic and cultural factors for battered Latinas, regardless of ethnic group membership, and Anglo women. Section A of the table shows that battered Latinas were significantly younger, less educated, and more likely to live below the poverty level than Anglo battered women. However, there were no ethnic differences in severity of abuse.

With regard to culturally linked factors, Section B of Table 1 reveals that almost twice as many Latinas, when compared to Anglo women, could be characterized as living in male-dominated relationships, a difference that is statistically significant at the bivariate level. Consistent with the research literature on the higher prevalence of problem drinking by Latino men relative to Anglo men (Kaufman Kantor, 1997), the data show that a significantly higher percentage of battered Latinas reported heavy drinking by their husbands.

TABLE 1. Sociodemographic and Cultural Differences Between Battered Women by Ethnicity and Latina Ethnic Groups Based on T-Tests, Chi-squares, and ANOVAs.

	Latinas ($n = 76$)	Anglos ($n = 117$)		
Part I. Ethnicity				
A. Sociodemographic Factors				
<i>M</i> Age	35	41**		
<i>M</i> Years of Education	9	12***		
% Below Poverty Level	44	13***		
% Severely Battered	37	34		
B. Cultural Factors				
% Male-Dominated Marriage	26	15*		
% Approve Husband-Wife Slapping	21	19		
% Husband Heavy Drinker	41	26*		
	Mexican ($n = 40$)	Mexican American ($n = 19$)	Puerto Rican ($n = 17$)	
Part II. Latina Ethnic Groups				
A. Sociodemographic Factors				
<i>M</i> Age	34	37	32	
<i>M</i> Years of Education	8	11	10***	
% Below Poverty Level	54	33	33	
% Severely Battered	41	26	41	
B. Cultural Factors				
% Male-Dominated Marriage	28	21	25	
% Approve Husband-Wife Slapping	17	21	29	
% Husband Heavy Drinker	33	63	35	
<i>M</i> Acculturation Score	9	15	14***	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$, *** $p < .0001$.

Although Latinas were not significantly more approving of wife slapping than their Anglo counterparts, a substantial number in both groups asserted approval.

Part II of Table 1 presents the sociodemographic and cultural factors among Mexican, Mexican American, and Puerto Rican battered women. Overall, there were few significant differences. Part II A indicates that Mexican battered wives reported significantly fewer years of education than Mexican American and Puerto Rican battered wives. Although there were no significant ethnic group differences in age, poverty level, and the experience of severe abuse, Mexican and Puerto Rican women reported high levels of severe abuse relative to Mexican American women.

Part II B of Table 1 reveals few cultural differences among Latina groups. Abused Mexican women were less acculturated, as measured by their English language preference, than both Mexican American and Puerto Rican women. Although Mexican American wives were twice as likely to have heavy drinking husbands as their Mexican and Puerto Rican counterparts, these differences were not statistically significant. Additionally, there were no ethnic group differences in marital power structure (male dominated) and approval of husband-to-wife slapping. It should be noted that small sample sizes may contribute to the lack of significant ethnic group differences.

Amount and Types of Help Sought

Table 2 shows the pattern and frequency of help seeking. When the total amount of help sought is considered, slightly less than half of the abused Latinas in this sample sought one or more types of help, while two thirds of Anglo women did so. Significant differences also were found in the types of help sought. Although the general patterns of help seeking were similar across ethnic groups, with friends and relatives the most likely source of support, Latinas sought less help from both informal and formal help sources. Specifically, Anglo battered women were almost twice as likely to contact friends and family members, and were 5 times more likely than Latinas to use psychologists. There were no statistically significant ethnic differences in the use of battered women's shelters, clergy members, or lawyers. Although not significant, it should be noted that more Latinas contacted the police, while more Anglo women consulted attorneys. With regard to the use of culturally specific resources, only one Mexican and one Mexican American woman sought help from a healer (not shown in table).

As illustrated in Table 2, Part II, we next explored the amount and types of help sought among the various Latina ethnic groups. The only statistically significant ethnic differences were in the utilization of informal help sources, with Mexican American battered women turning to friends and family members more often than to their Puerto Rican and Mexican counterparts. While not statistically significant, most likely because of the small sample sizes within groups, variations in help-seeking patterns across ethnic groups can be discerned. Less acculturated Mexican women were more likely to consult clergy members. However, they generally used fewer help sources relative to Mexican American and Puerto Rican women.

Bivariate Within Group Differences

In order to determine what group characteristics might be associated with the likelihood of help seeking, we first conducted bivariate analyses. Chi square and t-tests of significance were utilized, as appropriate to the level of measurement, for each sociodemographic and cultural factor by ethnicity and help-seeking status. Part A of Table 3 shows that Latinas

TABLE 2. Results of Chi-Square Analyses of Types of Help Sought by Ethnicity and Latina Ethnic Groups

Part I. Ethnicity	Percent Who Sought Help	
	Latinas (<i>n</i> = 76)	Anglos (<i>n</i> = 117)
Source of Help	%	%
Friend/Relative	35	61***
Shelter	4	2
Psychologist	4	20**
Clergy	16	14
Lawyer	4	9
Police	12	7
Others	-	2
Total ^a	48	66

Part II. Latina Ethnic Groups	Mexican (<i>n</i> = 40)	Mexican American (<i>n</i> = 19)	Puerto Rican (<i>n</i> = 17)
	%	%	%
Source of Help			
Friend/Relative	20	58	47*
Shelter	3	10	-
Psychologist	5	-	6
Clergy	20	17	6
Lawyer	3	5	6
Police	8	26	6
Others	-	-	-
Total ^a	38	63	53

^aTotal percentage of respondents who sought help from at least one source.

p* < .01, *p* < .001, ****p* < .0001.

TABLE 3. T-Test and Chi-Square Results of Sociodemographic and Cultural Factors by Ethnicity and Help Seeking Behavior

	Latinas		Anglos	
	No Help (<i>n</i> = 39)	Any Help (<i>n</i> = 36)	No Help (<i>n</i> = 39)	Any Help (<i>n</i> = 77)
A. Sociodemographic Factors				
<i>M</i> Age	36	33	47	38**
<i>M</i> Years of Education	9	10	12	12
% Below Poverty Level	50	35	11	15
% Severely Battered	33	40	28	37
B. Cultural Factors				
<i>M</i> Acculturation Score	10	13**	NA	NA
% Male-Dominated Marriage	22	31	18	13
% Approve of Husband-Wife Slapping	13	28	15	21
% Husband Heavy Drinker	31	54*	28	26

p* < .05 *p* < .001.

who sought help did not differ significantly from Latinas who did not seek help based on age, years of education, poverty level, and severity of abuse. However, it can be seen that poorer women were less likely to get any help. The help-seeking status for Anglo women was not associated with most of these sociodemographic variables. Age was the only significant exception. Anglo women who sought help were significantly younger than their nonhelp-seeking Anglo counterparts. The data also showed that severity of battering increased the likelihood of help seeking for all women regardless of ethnicity, but severity was not a significant discriminator of any occurrence of help seeking.

Part B of Table 3 examined the question of whether cultural determinants of help seeking are present for battered women. The findings revealed that Latinas who sought assistance were significantly more acculturated and more likely to have a heavy drinking husband compared to Latinas who did not seek help. It should be noted that the latter characteristics were more consistent with those of Mexican American women in this study. Cultural norms that support violence toward women and a male dominant relationship structure were more common among help-seeking battered Latinas, but the associations were not statistically significant. Among Anglo women, none of the culturally based factors differed by help-seeking status. Although like Latinas, cultural norms reflecting violence approval appear to increase help-seeking behavior.

Sociodemographic Predictors and Cultural Barriers to Help Seeking

To test our research question concerning the relative contribution of sociodemographic predictors to the likelihood of help seeking, we next conducted multivariate analyses. Because of the dichotomous nature of the help-seeking variable in this study, logistic regression analysis was selected to analyze the data. Although it would be desirable to conduct multivariate analyses for each Latina ethnic group, reliable analyses were not possible because of small sample size. The dependent variable was a dichotomy measuring any occurrence of help seeking related to the abuse (1 = any type of help sought). The dependent variables were ethnicity (1 = Anglo); age and education (both continuous variables), poverty as assessed by the income-to-needs measure (1 = below the poverty level), and severity of violence (1 = any severe violence).

The results presented in Table 4 show that our predictions are partially supported. Help seeking differed by ethnicity. Specifically, being Anglo tripled the probability of help seeking (by a factor of 3.08). Youthfulness also was associated with increased odds of getting help. Alternatively stated, as a woman's age increased, the odds of her seeking help decreased. Years of education, poverty level, and severity of abuse were not significant net of the effects of the other variables in the equation.

In order to examine the effects of cultural barriers to help seeking, we next conducted a logit analysis by regressing these factors on help seeking. We estimated a logit equation for each ethnic group separately so that different patterns might be identified. The dependent variable was a dichotomy-measuring help seeking related to battering. The independent variables were acculturation (a continuous variable) (Latina model only), marital power structure (1 = male dominant), approval of wife slapping (1 = yes for approval), and husband's heavy drinking (1 = heavy).

The results presented in Table 5 demonstrate partial support for cultural barriers to help seeking among battered Latinas. Level of acculturation increased the odds of help seeking by Latinas. The greater the preference for English, the greater the probability that the respondent sought assistance. A male-dominated marriage, normative approval of violence, and husband's heavy drinking were not significant predictors of help seeking among Latinas

**TABLE 4 Logistic Regression Results of Help-Seeking Status
(1 = Any Help Sought) by Sociodemographic Factors (N = 175)**

	B ^a	Odds Ratio
Ethnicity (1 = Anglo)	1.12* (.40)	3.08
Age	-.04** (.01)	.95
Education	.00 (.06)	1.00
Poverty Level (1= Below Poverty Level)	-.38 (.41)	.68
Severely Battered (1= Severe)	.29 (.34)	1.34
Constant	1.26	
-2 Log Likelihood	216.951	
Model Chi-Square	21.46	
df	5	
Sig.	p < .0001	

^aStandard errors are in parentheses.

*p < .005.

**p < .001.

**TABLE 5. Logistic Regression Results of Help Seeking Status
(1=Any Help Sought) by Cultural Barriers**

	Latinas (n = 72)		Anglos (n = 115)	
	B ^a	Odds Ratio	B ^a	Odds Ratio
Male-Dominated Marriage (1= male dominated)	.40 (.61)	1.49	-.45 (.54)	.63
Approve Husband-Wife Slapping (1 = approve)	.94 (.71)	2.57	.37 (.53)	1.46
Husband Heavy Drinker (1=Heavy)	.34 (.56)	1.41	-.10 (.44)	.90
Acculturation Score	.18* (.07)	1.20	NA	
Constant	-2.68		.73	
-2 Log Likelihood	85.90		144.75	
Model Chi-Square	13.85		1.18	
df	4		3	
Sig.	p < .05		p < .75	

^aStandard errors are in parentheses.

*p < .05.

net of the other factors in the model. Similarly, none of these cultural factors significantly influenced the odds of help seeking among Anglo women.

DISCUSSION

Data from a national survey were used to investigate the help-seeking efforts of Latinas and Anglo battered women. One concern was the extent to which Latinas and Anglo battered women differ on socioeconomic and cultural factors. Consistent with previous findings (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988; O'Keefe, 1994; Straus & Smith, 1990), battered Latinas in this sample are significantly younger and more likely than their Anglo counterparts to be educationally and economically disadvantaged. In addition, when compared to Anglo women, Latinas more often categorized their marriages as male dominated and their husbands as heavy drinkers. While Latinas and Anglo women are equally likely to experience severe violence, poverty and lack of resources may further exacerbate the abuse for Latinas. Moreover, the combination of lower educational attainment, income, and acculturation makes Mexican battered women more vulnerable and isolated.

Although battered women in this sample are active help seekers, there is a tendency for Latinas to underutilize informal resources. Specifically, they are less likely than Anglos to seek help from friends and relatives. This seems surprising because the general help-seeking literature suggests that family members are a common source of emotional support for Mexican Americans (Keefe, 1982). However, this emotional support may not extend to battered women. Using a shelter sample, Torres (1991) found that Mexican American women were more likely than Anglo women to be battered in the presence of relatives. This may explain why some Mexican American women might be reluctant to seek assistance from family members. The reasons why Latinas seek less help than Anglos from relatives and friends awaits further investigation. Among the various ethnic groups, Mexican women are less likely than Mexican American and Puerto Rican women to seek help from intimates. These findings may reflect the limited informal social support system available to immigrant women. For example, after relocating to the United States Mexican women may have fewer friends, family members, neighbors, and coworkers in which to confide (Keefe, 1982).

Although Anglo women are five times more likely to seek assistance from psychologists, Latinas are less likely to utilize formal help sources. Keefe (1982) argues that the use of mental health services is not consistent with the cultural values of Latinas. Instead, Latinas may more often turn to clergy members for support, particularly if they are immigrant women with limited support systems. Although Mexican women in this sample are not significantly more likely to turn to religious leaders, there is a slight tendency for them to seek help from the clergy more than Mexican and Puerto Rican women would. However, few Latinas in this study consulted healers.

Although not significant, battered Latinas in this sample more frequently turned to the police for assistance, while Anglo women more often consulted lawyers. Battered Latinas may be fearful of the discrimination that their partners will face in the criminal justice system (Rasche, 1988), but the police may be one of the few legal options available to lower-income women. When ethnic group differences were considered, fewer Mexican women sought help from the police. As a result of limited education and English-speaking skills, Mexican women may be less knowledgeable of their legal rights. In contrast, the combination of battering and a husband's heavy drinking may contribute to the greater willing-

ness of Mexican American women to contact the police. In addition, Mexican American women, because they are more educated and acculturated, may be somewhat better able to negotiate the legal system.

When sociodemographic predictors of help seeking are considered, we find that being young and Anglo are predictors of help-seeking efforts, a finding that is similar to previous research (Woodward et al., 1992). Although education and poverty level are not significant predictors of help seeking in this study, they are correlated with ethnicity and are likely to play a role in the ability or willingness of victims to obtain assistance. Similarly, severity of battering was not associated with seeking assistance in this study. However, the potential lethality of abuse has been found to be predictive of help seeking in other studies (Harris & Dewdney, 1994).

An advantage of this study is that within-ethnic group differences are considered. Age is the only difference between help-seeking and nonhelp-seeking Anglo women. Specifically, Anglo women who sought help are more likely to be under age 40. In contrast, help-seeking Latinas, when compared to Latinas who did not seek assistance, are more acculturated as defined by a greater preference for English and are more likely to have heavy drinking husbands. However, based on multivariate analysis, level of acculturation is the only significant predictor of help seeking by battered Latinas. Consistent with previous research (Altarriba & Santiago-Rivera, 1994; Woodard et al., 1992), individuals who are proficient in English appear to have greater access to formal help sources.

This study has some limitations, however. First, reliable analyses of Latina ethnic group differences were not possible because of small sample size. Based on our findings there are important differences between Mexican, Mexican American, and Puerto Rican battered women that warrant further investigation. Second, acculturation was measured by English preference. Although the validity of language preference as a way to measure cultural adoption may be questioned, language proficiency and preference have been shown to account for the largest proportion of variance in measures of acculturation (Domino, 1992; Cueller, Harris, & Jasso, 1980). Finally, we do not know how many battered women in this sample sought medical attention for injuries related to their abuse. It is not uncommon for Mexican Americans to consult physicians for emotional problems (Keefe, 1982). Future research needs to explore this important help source. In addition, we could not assess the perceived usefulness of these services to battered women. It could be that services are not used because victims have found them to be insensitive.

Implications for Treatment

Although addressing the problem of abuse may not be their primary role, many professionals will confront the needs of battered women. Based on our research, it can be concluded that certain groups of women may benefit from increased outreach efforts. Service providers must make their assistance relevant to middle-aged and older Anglo women. This may entail addressing the stigma of seeking assistance for marital problems, including partner violence.

As the Latino population increases, helping professionals must be more aware of the sociocultural experiences that differentially impact battering among the various Latino ethnic groups (Kaufman Kantor et al., 1994). For example, service providers may need to help a Mexican American battered woman escape her abuser as well as deal with his heavy drinking. Less educated and acculturated Mexican women may require greater help negotiating various help sources.

In addition, the institutional barriers that make it difficult for Latinas to gain access to services must be addressed. For instance, agencies may lack translators, bilingual professionals, and reading materials in the client's native language. Other structural barriers include rules against treating non-English speaking or immigrant clients, geographic distance from minority communities and prohibitive fee structures (Williams & Becker, 1994; West, 1998). Increased attention to both sociodemographic and cultural barriers may enable Latinas and Anglo battered women to have greater access to resources.

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